

Innovative Fisheries Management: Our identity, vision and values

Vision

IFM will search for sustainable development and social justice for maritime-linked communities. A key for IFM in this search is to assist society in building consensus about balanced approaches to the wicked problems of natural resource governance. We consider consensus as a civilised process of reaching agreement about a balanced approach that everybody will accept to live with in mutual respect of other interests.

Identity

IFM is a policy-oriented and multidisciplinary social science research and advisory centre within Aalborg University. IFM focuses on governance research and development within an ecosystem-based approach to marine and fisheries management, using an empirical problem-based method. The applied approach is result-oriented and focused on facilitating societal needs in relation to policy development, impacts and challenges. This is accomplished through evidence-based research for policy design and the support of coping strategies among stakeholders. In this way, IFM engages with society through both research design and the delivery of policy-relevant research results.

IFM staff expertise covers a broad spectrum of social science disciplines - anthropology, business economics, geography, political science and sociology - as well as marine biology and environmental engineering. In addition, staff members frequently team up with institutions and colleagues from other disciplines to integrate perspectives and develop adequate solutions to complex problems.

Core theme

IFM's work focuses on policy-oriented research pertaining to the interaction between nature and society, particularly in marine, estuarine and coastal environments. The primary interest in this interaction is the development of coping and adaptation strategies among those whose lives and practices are affected by social, economic, environmental and political change. For example, environmental change and management measures devised to ensure the sustainable use of the sea often have major consequences for stakeholders dependent upon marine resources. Developing innovative strategies to address these consequences is critical in order to ensure policies that are balanced in terms of both environmental objectives and social sustainability.

Those dependent on the sea—and hence affected by marine policies—include those employed in various maritime sectors offshore (e.g., fisheries, wind farms and aggregate extraction) and onshore (e.g., tourism, the seafood processing industry and the service sector). IFM's focus on stakeholders should be understood broadly to encompass all direct and indirect users of the marine environment and the maritime interests of society at large.

While our underlying motivation is to study and contribute to the development of innovative strategies, our work addresses processes at all levels of governance and policy, from the international to the local.

Core values/engaging with communities

The core values of IFM are *sustainability*, *democracy* and *efficiency* and these core values are the object of our research. For more general principles informing our work and research, refer to the IFM Code of Ethics which can be read here www.ifm.aau.dk.

Sustainability

The core value of IFM research is the view that sustainable human societies and cultures depend on well-functioning, resilient natural environments. Hence, we contribute to the development and maintenance of natural environments that are diverse, rich, resilient and productive. We do not aim for environments that are unaffected by human use, but rather seek forms of coexistence between society and nature that ensure the long-term sustainability of both.

Democracy

In order to be equitable, fair and efficient, access to maritime resources and the decision processes in this respect must also be democratic. This principle also underlies IFM's own research as we apply dialogue-based methods interacting with stakeholders and society. Hence, in addition to producing scientific publications and participating in the academic community, we also engage with the wider society at different levels.

IFM works with stakeholders as mediators and facilitators to assist in the design of policy strategies. IFM research challenges and adds to the traditional notions of knowledge and power structures by examining power and culture. Researchers also serve as members on boards and advisory committees that engage in public policy debates. Through such activities, our research builds lasting relationships with communities and stakeholders.

Efficiency

It is IFM's view that institutions and processes should make the best use of societies' resources. In order to be efficient, decision processes and policy must be considered legitimate by those who have to live with the consequences, requiring that local conditions and practices be taken into account. Thus, IFM believes in inclusive processes, sensitivity to local conditions and solutions informed by social and biological knowledge.

Examples of IFM products

IFM maintains an international perspective that complements our domestic and regional work within Denmark and the EU. In addition IFM has over the years been a participant and coordinator of large research projects and advisory teams in Southeast and East Asia, Southern Africa, North America and the Arctic. All these projects and activities have taken various forms ranging from the design of inclusive governance with stakeholder involvement to social impact assessments and integration of policies and science studies.

Stakeholder involvement

IFM has a long track record of providing methods and knowledge to facilitate stakeholder involvement in policy processes at various stages and levels of policy advice. Experiences range from conducting individual and focus group interviews to improve policy implementation, to designing procedures for stakeholder involvement in scientific advice and policy processes at national, regional and EU levels.

At one end of the spectrum, IFM staff have interviewed fishermen to help design management measures. At the other end of the spectrum, IFM staff have conducted focus group interviews and high-level workshops to assist in the design of regional decision-making structures under the Common Fisheries Policy

and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. IFM has also formulated and reviewed research programmes for donor-agency development assistance to fishing communities.

IFM also conducts participatory research and has been involved in a long series of collaborative projects to develop tools to involve stakeholders in the knowledge base for policy.

As advisors, IFM researchers have been involved in the formulation and evaluation of development, research and educational projects within fisheries, marine policy and coastal management for institutional clients such as DANIDA, the EU, FAO, IFAD, IUCN, Mekong River Commission, Norad and UNDP as well as a variety of national authorities, development organisations and industry bodies.

Social Impact Assessments

A branch of IFM's activities is the conduct of social impact assessments (SIAs). IFM's approach to SIAs is distinct in that it reflects an emphasis on dialogue and interaction with the impacted parties. IFM SIAs are not desk studies of indicators but rather involve on-site innovative and in-depth research. This process allows the more intangible issues to be taken into account. Examples include a range of SIAs in various coastal communities evaluating the potential effects of the EU's cod recovery plan and the introduction of new fisheries management plans in Greenland.

Integration of policies

In recent years, IFM has expanded into research in and issues of policy integration. Fisheries-dependent communities worldwide are increasingly impacted by policies within and across other sectors, and IFM staff has been active in exploring these new interrelations. Concretely, IFM has been involved in research projects exploring how to govern the marine area through integrated rather than sectorial governance structures.

Science studies

IFM has also been involved in a long series of projects addressing the way complex problems are managed in the development of scientific advice in European fisheries and marine management. For example, IFM has been involved in experimental participatory computer modelling in management evaluation frameworks to develop practices that include stakeholders in the definition of management options, variables, uncertainties and scenarios to be tested in scientific advice. IFM staff has also interviewed ICES science advisors and stakeholders about issues of transparency and scientific uncertainty in the advisory system. Outside Europe, IFM has interviewed fishers, policy makers and civil servants in fisheries in Malawi, Zambia, Laos, Mozambique, South Africa and Vietnam about their local ecological knowledge in the interest of including it in the knowledge base for management.

The above examples illustrate IFM's multidisciplinary approach and our long experience with working in diverse research and development contexts. Furthermore, the dialogue-based approach and project practices have given IFM strong working relations with civil servants, policymakers and stakeholders at national, European and international levels.

IFM's areas of interest and expertise have worldwide applications to marine resources, as well as to common resources beyond those of the marine environment.